

Don't Get Burned!

**You can be fined up
to \$10,000 for illegal
OPEN BURNING in
North Carolina**

There are a lot of misunderstandings about open-air burning in North Carolina. Some people think it's OK to burn trash in barrels because they've always done it that way. It's not. Others think it's always OK to burn leaves and branches in the fall. But that's not so in cities and counties that pick up yard waste.

The N.C. Division of Air Quality (DAQ) enforces the state open burning rules and many local governments have additional restrictions on outdoor fires. Violating these rules can be expensive -- with fines as high as \$10,000 for serious cases or repeat violations. Substantial fines are assessed, even for minor or first-time violations.



It's the Law

The basic message of the state open-burning rule is simple: Only leaves, branches and other plant growth can be burned – nothing else. That means no trash, lumber, tires or old newspapers. If local pickup is available, you can't burn even leaves and branches. Do not burn:

- Garbage, paper and cardboard
- Tires and other rubber products
- Building materials, including lumber and wood scraps
- Wire, plastics and synthetic materials
- Asphalt shingles and heavy oils
- Paints, household and agricultural chemicals

What's allowed under the law? Homeowners can burn yard trimmings – excluding logs and stumps over 6 inches in diameter – if it's allowed under local ordinances, no public pickup is available, and it doesn't cause a public nuisance. Other allowable burning includes campfires, outdoor barbecues and bonfires for festive occasions. Landowners also can open burn vegetation to clear land or rights-of-way, provided that:

- Prevailing winds are away from built up areas and roads
- Fires are at least 1,000 feet away from occupied buildings
- Burning is done between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Other occasions where open burning is allowed – with DAQ approval – include fires for: training fire-fighting personnel; managing forest lands or wildlife habitats; controlling agricultural diseases and pests; and disposing materials generated by hurricanes, tornadoes and other natural disasters. You may need a permit from the N.C. Division of Forest Resources or local governments before you burn, even for allowable purposes. However, such permits do not excuse a person from following the state's open-burning rules.

Smoke Can Hurt You and Others

Why does the state have such strict rules about open burning? Because smoke from outdoor fires can cause serious health problems and pollute the air. Such fires also can burn out of control, destroying forests and burning down homes.

Smoke from a burning trash pile contains many pollutants that can cause serious health problems and damage the environment. When a trash pile burns, 8 percent or more of the material ends up as air pollutants -- some of which are highly toxic. Although smoke from a fire may not bother you, it could be a nuisance and serious health threat for your neighbors, particularly if they have respiratory conditions such as asthma or emphysema. Long-term exposure to air pollution also can cause a number of illnesses, including cancer and heart disease.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

A lot of open burning isn't necessary. Brush can be composted, ground up for mulch, piled up for wildlife, or just left to rot. Newspapers, cardboard and plastic can be recycled. Old attic junk can be given away for someone else to reuse. By making a few sensible choices, you can reduce the amount of throw-away material you create in the first place. The possibilities are endless.

Take a look at what you've decided to burn. Isn't there something else you can do with it? For more information about reducing, reusing or recycling waste, contact the State Office of Waste Reduction at (919) 715-6500 or your city or county manager's office.

Plan Ahead

You don't need a special permit from the Division of Air Quality for allowable fires. However, you may need a permit from your town or local forest ranger. Open burning can be a nuisance, and local officials may establish rules to reduce that nuisance. Check with local officials before you burn.

Open burning that is more than 100 feet from your home and within 500 feet of a woodland normally requires a permit from the N.C. Division of Forest Resources (DFR). The DFR does not charge for permits. If you want to start an outdoor fire, contact your local forest ranger to find out if and how you can get a permit. Or call the DFR headquarters at (919) 733-2162. The DFR is primarily concerned with fire danger while the DAQ deals with air pollution. Remember, following one agency's regulations does not guarantee compliance with the other.

The N.C. Division of Air Quality (DAQ) is part of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The DAQ is responsible for maintaining and improving the quality of North Carolina's air. For more information about the division and laws for protecting air quality, please contact one of our regional offices listed below.



James B. Hunt Jr., Governor
Wayne McDevitt, Secretary

For additional copies of this brochure, contact the Division of Air Quality at (919) 715-7408.
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